

SPOTLIGHT



Scott Blue, pilot extraordinaire



Mikey McBryan, manager of Buffalo Airways

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The Ice Pilots cometh

By Flannery Dean

You've got to pity the production crew of History Television's dramatic new documentary series, *Ice Pilots NWT*. Filmed in the glacial climes of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, a.k.a. "Canada's coldest city" with temperatures that can plunge to -51.C°, the inhospitable winter weather is palpable. Fortunately, this sacrifice of warmth isn't in vain. *Ice Pilots*, which documents the daily travails of the pilots and crewmembers at Buffalo Airways, a small but essential airline in the frozen north, is a fun and unique addition to the "dangerous/miserable job" reality show genre. The cast is character-rich, to say the least (just wait until you meet mechanic Chuck Adams) and the drama balances TV-worthy life-and-death moments with the petty aggravations and interpersonal squabbles that define modern employment.

Two of the series' stars, genial pilot Scott Blue and equally good-humoured manager Mikey McBryan discuss Yellowknife weather, how it feels to fly vintage planes, and what it's like to see themselves on TV.

How cold does it get in Yellowknife and how do you stay warm?

SB: The coldest I've ever experienced, and not including the windchill, is -48C°. You just bury yourself in clothes. It takes you about 15 minutes: double socks, long johns, fleece-lined jeans, and then full snow pants; T-shirts, followed by long-sleeved thin stuff and then heavy-duty long sleeves; fleeces and vests. Then you've got your heavy-duty jacket on top of that. Toques don't cut it. You need a full-on winter hat. For gloves, you have liner gloves and then massive mitts. [You have to wear] a facemask. Pretty much your eyes are the only things exposed at -40.

Scott, what is it about flying these old planes that appeals to you?

SB: I guess I'm nostalgic. My grandfather was in WWII and I remember when I was a kid he would always have coffee table books at his cottage and I'd be flipping through them, so maybe

it was embedded in my head at an early age. When I finished flight school, I thought to myself 'Where am I going to go?' What am I going to fly? I always pictured myself being in some weird Northern community and then out of the mist comes a ghost plane that some crazy Northern operator is still flying, almost out of a time warp. And on my first morning at Buffalo that's pretty much what happened when the C-46 landed. I didn't even know what the C-46 was. I thought it was some variant of the D-3. It shows up and I was like, 'What the heck is this old plane?'

Mikey, your father, "Buffalo" Joe, is the owner of the airline and you work for him as the manager. Is it fair to say he's a fairly intimidating boss?

MM: Yeah, that's his management style for sure. Onscreen, what you see is what you get. He really didn't dumb it down or anything. That's how he is. It only changes after all the work is done. During work hours, he's 100 per cent boss. My father is like a booming voice from above. Sometimes he just runs around and yells and I have to go and literally clean up the mess. I wouldn't say that I'm the decision maker, because there is one sole decision maker, which is the Fuhrer there. I'm sort of like Moses. I didn't write the Ten Commandments but I've got to live by them.

Have you ever thought about flying?

MM: I did when I was younger. I got what they call a recreational license and I got about 40 or 50 hours. But it really wasn't just for me.

Do you have a fear of flying?

MM: Marginally, yes. It's not a fear of these airplanes, but a fear about the fact that you basically have to rely on yourself when you're up there. I'm enough of a mess on the ground. I'd hate to see how I'd do in the air.

How does it feel to watch yourself on TV?

SB: I had my first self-conscious moment last night when I ran into a friend and she started making fun of me. During one of my clips on the website I say 'you know' about fifteen times in a two-minute span. I haven't seen the episodes yet. I'm looking forward to Wednesday to actually see it. I'm curious to see how our lives change in that regard. It's a very small town as it is, so now we'll be walking around town and I'm sure it'll be like 'Hey, it's the ice pilots! Man, you looked like a moron last night.'

***Ice Pilots NWT* debuts this Wednesday, November 18 at 10 p.m. on The History Channel.**